

MAYOR SHARPE JAMES

City of Newark, New Jersey

Sharpe James was elected mayor of Newark on May 13, 1986. He is the 35th person to be elected mayor of New Jersey's largest city, and gained nation-wide recognition when he defeated Newark's first black mayor, Kenneth A. Gibson, who was seeking an unprecedented fifth term in office.

Mayor James served on the City Council for 16 years before unseating the incumbent chief executive.

First elected to public office as South Ward Councilman in 1970 as part of the "Community Choice" ticket headed by Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson, Mr. James handily won re-election on the first ballot in 1974, and again in 1978, when he ran unopposed, the first public official in the city's history to do so. In 1982, he again sought to make Newark history by choosing to run city-wide for an at-large council seat. Having topped the ticket in both the municipal and runoff elections, he became the first person to serve Newark as both a ward and at-large councilman. Mr. James is the first councilman to be elected Mayor.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida on February 20, 1936, Mayor James has lived most of his life in Newark. He was graduated from Miller Street and South Side High (now Malcolm X. Shabazz) Schools and with honors from Montclair State College. He holds a master's degree from Springfield College, where he received the 1961 Department of Physiology Award for his research work under the guidance of the late, Dr. Peter V. Karpovich, a renowned physiologist. Mayor James has done advanced study at Washington State, Columbia, and Rutgers Universities. He served as a teaching/research assistant under Dr. Philip D. Gollnick while at Washington State University.

For 18 years prior to his election, Mayor James was a professor at Essex County College in the Division of Behavioral Science. At the college, he was the first of his race to serve as department chairman and director of athletics within the state college system. He was also the first Black person to serve as president of a state college athletic conference.

Mr. James served with the U.S. Army in Europe. Later as a Newark public school teacher for seven years, he coached city, county and state championship track and cross-country teams at Weequahic and West Side High Schools. An avid tennis player, Mayor James is Newark's senior champion and former New Jersey State American Tennis Association champion. He is also a member of the New Jersey Ski Club.

A longtime community activist, Mr. James is the founder and organizer of the Little City Hall, Inc., a volunteer aide to U.S. Senator Bill Bradley and past president of the Weequahic Opportunity Center (Area Board 9) and Weequahic Community Council. He also is a charter member and past executive officer of the Organization of Negro Educators (ONE), an executive of the Scholarship Assistance Guidance Association (SAGA) and former civil rights chairman for the Business and Industrial Coordinating Council. Other memberships include: the Newark Committee for the Homeless, the NAACP, Friends of Symphony Hall, Montclair State College Alumni Association Board of Directors, Newark Collaboration Group and Celebrating the Arts Committee.

He and his wife, Mary, have three sons, John, Elliott and Kevin. They live in Newark's South Ward.